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10 March 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: China Overflight Considerations

1. To ensure that the necessary homework would be done if there should be a decision to mount U-2 photographic reconnaissance missions, I convened a caucus of the concerned brethren on 9 March. Present at the session were Messrs. George Allen [REDACTED]

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James Lilly [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] and myself.

2. We reviewed the bidding on the whole problem and various aspects thereof in some detail. Three memoranda were then commissioned, the completed versions of which are attached hereto. The first is a brief resume of current photo reconnaissance capabilities in the North Vietnam/China border area. These are, in a word, slim.

3. The second paper, prepared under Mr. Allen's aegis in coordination with OER and DDP/FE, is a restatement of target requirements designed to bring the extant COMIREX list up to date. It is self-explanatory and will serve as a useful aid to planning actual missions if the decision is made to fly them.

4. The third attachment merits some explanation. There was a good deal of rather brisk debate at our meeting over the political risks or consequences of mounting U-2 overflights of Chinese Communist territory [REDACTED]. The views of the brethren on this issue were sharply divided. Some, particularly [REDACTED]

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felt the political risks were considerable and that before advancing requests or recommendations for overflights we should weigh very carefully the kind of signals such flights might convey regarding over-all US China policy or the damage they might do to current efforts at Warsaw or elsewhere to impart a slight thaw in Peking's frigid relations with Washington. Others (including Messrs. Lilly, [] and myself) were of the opinion that the political risks were minimal since the Chinese would expect such intelligence collection efforts and though the Chinese would probably contest them where possible (with AAA, SAMs or even MIG-21s), such flights would not be likely to prompt Peking into doing anything it had not already decided to do anyway. Also, some of us felt that the Agency ought to base its request on considerations of intelligence requirements and while acknowledging the political dimensions of the problem frankly, let other components of the government (e.g., State) be the ones to address them.

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5. To be sure you got the full flavor of the range of opinions voiced at the meeting, I asked [] to write a memorandum arguing the political consideration case forcefully and frankly. His memorandum constitutes the third attachment to this note. It is a well written devil's advocate paper reflecting opinions that are certain to be raised at any 40 Committee discussion. It is not a coordinated consensus distillate of the brethren's net judgments -- nor was it offered as such. It does not reflect the views of this office or, necessarily, those of the OCI front office.

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George A. Carver, Jr.
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

Attachments



Memorandum - "Political Implications of US Overflights of Chinese Territory"

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